

# THE NEW MUSEOLOGY IN MUSEUM PRACTICE IN CHINA

*A Case Study in Hubei Provincial Museum*

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A MASTER'S PROJECT

Presented to the Arts and Administration Program  
of the University of Oregon  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in Arts Management  
Museum Studies Certificate

June 2018

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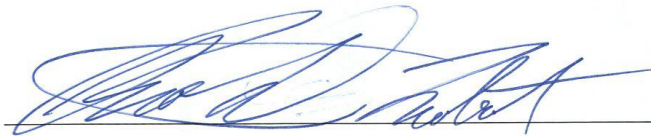


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**ABSTRACT**

As one of the major lifelong learning possibilities outside the education system, museums have always been an important venue to the public. Throughout their long history, there has been a major shift in museology from being a collections-centered museum to a visitor-centered museum in recent years. As China develops economically, museums have become greater in number, size, and scope. However, Chinese museums might neglect the importance of the visitor experience. With a framework of new museology and models a new participatory museum, this research project attempts to understand the visitor-centered practice in China through document analysis and a case study of the Hubei Provincial Museum in Hubei, China. This study intends to understand the implementation of theory into practices and offer useful recommendations to the museum professionals in China.

**KEYWORDS**

*New museology, participatory museum, museum practice, visitor experience, Chinese museums*

## Acknowledgments

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I would like to thank my research adviser, David Turner, for your support and help in the research process. Your professional knowledge and unique insight in completing this project are invaluable. Thank you to Dr. Patricia Lambert for making time and energy to each of us in the Arts and Administration and being the advisor in supporting every research student.

Also, I would especially like to thank to the staffs of Hubei Provincial Museum for their support and assistance, particularly Mr. Quanwen Wan and Ms. Hong Qian. Also, thank you to all who offered me valuable insight through the interview and observation process.

Thank you to my family, especially my parents, for supporting my study abroad, loving me no matter what, and being my spiritual pillar forever. I cannot make this happen without you.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The ‘new museology’ was initially developed to introduce new philosophies about how museums work and the changing relationship between museums and their societies and communities. This study explores the extent to which the concept of new museology has been implemented in practice throughout Chinese museums. It begins by drawing the origins and shifts about the new museology and emphasizing the visitors’ interactive experiences in museum. This paper then uses information collected from qualitative interviews with museum staffs and observations of the museum exhibit halls in Hubei Provincial Museum to probe the extent to which this museum meets the criteria of the ‘new museology’.

The case study of Hubei Provincial Museum in this paper examines the three aspects of the museum practices in terms of the concept of new museology. The exhibit design is first explored, followed by educational gallery tour, and the public educational program. The author, through interviews and observation, examined to what extent that Hubei Provincial Museum is engaging the concept of new museology into daily professional practice. Finally, this paper presents recommendations and conclusions that could benefit similar Chinese museums with this specific case study.

### **Problem Statement**

Museums in China have a long history but have experienced a very slow professional development. In the past decade or so, the number of museums has been increasing rapidly. In December 1978, the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee marked a new era in which China entered the period of “reform and opening up” (Ye, 2007). During this period, the Chinese government advocated “internal reform, opening up to the outside world”. This decision reversed the isolation of the China mainland which had been in place since 1949,

enabling China's economy to develop rapidly due to participation in the world economy. As a result, museums in China entered a period of rapid growth. Since the 1990s, government investment in large-scale museums has increased significantly (Ye, 2007). According to the latest statistics (2018) from the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, as of the end of 2016, the number of registered museums in China had reached 4,873, an increase of 181% over 2015. There are 4,246 museums open to the public with free admission, accounting for 87.1% of the total number of national museums.

However, the development of contemporary Chinese museums advocating the new museology is still in its infancy, growing quantitatively rather than qualitatively. Most of the curation and design of an exhibition in museums lacks an accounting for the visitors' perspective and allowing in-depth visitor participation. Many Chinese museums still deliver a one-way export of knowledge from the museum to the audience, and they lack the two-way interactive mode that allows audience participation. In March 2015, the "Museum Regulations," China's first national regulatory document in the museum industry was implemented. According to the regulations (Regulation on Museums, 2015), "museum means .... for the purpose of education, research and appreciation," and the top priority of the three major functions in the museum is now education. This adjustment of the order of the three purposes reflects the improvement of the museum's awareness of the importance of education. At one time, the museums in China paid much more attention to research than to education. However, over time, domestic museums began to consciously prioritize their educational function, subdivided the group and formed an education system. At present, research on museum interactive exhibitions in China is still limited; however, some scholars are now focusing attuning to the audience's experience in museums.

## Conceptual framework

For this research, I analyzed the demonstration of the new museology in the Hubei Provincial Museum in Wuhan, Hubei, China. I analyzed the role of curator, docents, and public educator in the transition to the new museology and explored the implementation, or lack thereof, of visitor engagement. This research is approached with the recognition that visitor-centered experience is the best museological trend in the museum field. For the purpose of my research and in the context of Chinese museums, new museology stands for the planned transition from collection-focused to visitor-focused exhibition model, and the attempts to integrate visitors' knowledge and experience into museum practices, including exhibit design, labels, panels, docent interpretation, program development, and education in Hubei Provincial Museum.

The interpretation of the new museology and what composes new museum practices is presented in Nina Simon's 2001 *The Participatory Museum* and John H. Falk & Lynn D. Dierking's 2013 *The Museum Experience Revisited*. The practices will be evaluated against Simon's and Falk's parameters and narratives.

## Research Methodology

**Purpose and Research Questions.** The purpose of this study is to better understand how “new museology” is changing the museum practices in Hubei Provincial Museum in China. This research is a qualitative case study conducted through interviews, observations and document analysis, all of which demonstrate the practices related to increasing the visitors' learning experiences and participation in museum activities. The research also testifies whether the museum fits into the theoretical framework of a participatory museum. Interviews with the Hubei

Provincial Museum staff and observations of the museum visitors helped the author understand the connection between museum practices and hosting a participatory collection and exhibit. The study focused on the practice related to visitor participation in Hubei Provincial Museum and was conducted in December 2017.

The main research question of this paper is to what extent is the Hubei Provincial Museum engaging new museology practices and has it demonstrated success? Other research questions were:

- How can a museum optimize visitors' interactive experiences in the exhibit hall?
- What are the best practices in terms of exhibit design, educational gallery tours, and public programs?
- How does Hubei Provincial Museum integrate the new museology into routine work?

**Definitions.** In order to articulate the research, several terms need to be defined. The **new museology**, in this research, refers to the significant shift in the museum function from being collection- and research-focused to being visitor-focused. A detailed explanation can be found in the first part of this paper's literature review chapter. **Exhibit design** includes any infrastructure, collection, label, or panel in an exhibition area that can help visitors understand the artifacts. The **museum practice** describes the extensive professional work in the museum from management and the development of collections, exhibitions and programs to the various administrative activities that take place in the museum. This paper focuses on the relation between the curator's, educator's and programmer's work. The **docent** refers to the museum staff who conducts the gallery educational tour, which is sometimes undertaken by the volunteers. The **learning style** refers to the method how the docent conveys the information and how the visitors receive them. A **Public Program** includes a series of interactive activities in relation to a specific exhibit,

primarily the permanent exhibit. The main purpose of the public program is to maximize the museum's educational function and social responsibilities using creative activities and imaginative introductions. The **interactive area** refers to the space where visitors can become engaged using one of the five senses (seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, or smelling). For example, the interactive area often includes a touch screen, video viewing, or touchable model.

**Research Limitation and Delimitations.** The limitations of this study include the choice of the museum site and the interviewees. Due to time restraints, the author selected only one museum rather than multiple museums in China and chose a cultural and history museum rather than an art museum. This was one of study's potential limitations but is also a strength. The study does not generally explore the museum practice, but specifically focuses on Hubei Provincial Museum. Through this study, the author hopes to give recommendations that can improve the museum practice.

Although museology is a broad term with various aspects, this study emphasizes are the actions that museums take to increase the visitors' learning experiences and participation. Similarly, the museum practice includes many professional skillsets, and this study focuses on three areas: exhibition design, educational gallery tour and development of public programs. As the study is conducted in China using a western museum framework, the researcher understated (rather than seriously considered) the differences in government operations, cultural policies, and organizational structures and focused on the internal practice of the museum.

## **Research Design**

**Research approach/dimensions of research.** Interviews with the Hubei Provincial Museum staff and observations of the museum helped me understand the connection between the museum practice and being participatory museum. The study is focused on the visitor

participation in Hubei Provincial Museum and was conducted in December 2017.

**Overview of research design.** This research is a qualitative case study conducted through interviews, observations and document analysis. Through the methods, I better understood the practices in related to increasing visitors' learning experience and participation in the museum, and report whether they fit into the theoretical framework or at what level they are in terms of including participatory activities.

I chose the Hubei Provincial Museum due to my experience working there as a docent and public program educator; thus, I am familiar with its operation as well as the staff. I also chose it due to its accessibility and feasibility.

**Interview.** I chose the interviewees who had responsibilities related to the operating system of the museum or who had close contact with visitors. Totally 4 participants were chosen:

- Quanwen Wan, Executive Deputy Director & Curator in Hubei Provincial Museum
- Hong Qian, Director of Public Programs in Hubei Provincial Museum
- Bing Cai, Deputy Director of Public Programs in Hubei Provincial Museum
- Meng Song, Docent in Hubei Provincial Museum

The participants were recruited through email (see Appendix G). Interviews were conducted in-person on-site in China in December 2017 (see Appendix D, E, F).

**Observations.** Observations were conducted in the museum (see Appendix F). The researcher observed the labels, the panels, the interactive equipment, the interactive area, the educational program, the docent interpretation during the educational gallery tour, the interaction between visitors and the exhibit, and other actions in relation to the visitor.

**Document analysis.** Documents such as *Regulations of Museums in China (2015)*, the museum website, and the museum annual reports were analyzed in order to better understand the

strategies used to engage the visitors.

## **Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

### **Overview**

Data was collected in Hubei Provincial Museum in Wuhan, Hubei, China, through museum staff interviews, on-site observations, and document analysis.

The interviews were conducted in the meeting room in Hubei Provincial Museum. Each interview lasted between 45-60 minutes using audio recording equipment. Only the researcher and faculty research adviser have access to the research data and records.

On-site observations were conducted in Hubei Provincial Museum in Wuhan, Hubei, China. The observed elements included but were not limited to the labels, the exhibit layout, visitor interactive areas, visitor feedback area, and other activities related to the visitor experience.

**Provisions for participant and data confidentiality.** Interviewees signed an informed consent form as a prerequisite for participation in the study. Manually-recorded data was transferred to a password-protected computer immediately, and data was stored there for the duration of the data analysis; it will be destroyed after one year's period of time.

**Strategies for validating findings.** The researcher took measures to increase validity in this study, including engagement with the Hubei Provincial Museum (in the form of observations), with its documents (for document analysis), and with staff members (during interviews) for the length of time necessary to extract all relevant data. Additionally, peers and advisers reviewed and critiqued this study at all stages to ensure sound methodologies and logic. Disconfirming evidence was also sought out in order to avoid acquiring only data that supports the expected results. Three data collection methods were used to provide a well-developed data

corpus, with well-rounded and adequate sources. During the process of data collection and at the completion of data collection, museum members checks took place to ensure interviewee ideas, thoughts, and statements were accurately reflected and that appropriate conclusions were drawn.

### **Investigator Experience**

Sisi Lu holds a Bachelor of Art in Musicology (Pedagogical; Vocal Music) in China. Post-graduation, she worked as an interpreter and public education program coordinator in Hubei Provincial Museum for three years. Because of these visitor-related work experiences, she started to become interested in visitor behavior and experience in the museum. Over the summer of 2017, she worked as an intern in the Museum of Natural and Cultural History in Eugene, OR, US, and conducted an exhibit evaluation project. In this internship, she became familiar with the visitor-centered museum practice, which in her opinion is the best museum practice.

### **Benefit (finding) of the research**

This research articulates the evolution of museology in terms of visitor experience and explores whether the museums in China fall into the category of participatory museums. The researcher hopes the case study Hubei Provincial Museum will inspire and help them to become aware of the importance of visitors' involvement in the museum. Due to the cultural differences, it is hard for Chinese museums to exactly duplicate American practices, but this study might enlighten the museum professionals about the current shift in the museum field.



## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### New museology

In general, the concept of new museology refers to museum's attempts to expand upon their traditional focus on interpreting collections by better engaging visitors in lifelong learning. Peter Vergo, the editor of "The New Museology," published in 1989, declares the definition of the "new museology" as "... a state of widespread dissatisfaction with the 'old' museology, both within and outside the museum profession; .... What is wrong with the 'old' museology is that it is too much about museum *methods*, and too little about the purposes of museums" (1989, p.3). Hudson (1977) announces that the "new museology" was evolved due to the recognition of the defects of the original museology and was based on the idea that the role of the museum in society needed to be changed, which was that museum were considered to be isolated, elitist, and a waste of public money in 1977. American museologist Julia D. Harrison (1994) indicates that the concept of the new museology is related to the concept of "traditional" museology and attempts to do a thorough review and criticism of past concepts. The original museum concept was that museums were collection-centered and building-based institutions and were a "cultural authority" advocating and spreading the truth in the general public's understanding (Harrison, 1993). This results in the interest of narrow social groups dominating how the museum operates and determining of the role of the museum (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). Therefore, the traditional museology can be seen as privilege in both collection function and the cultural taste of specific social groups (McCall & Gray, 2013). The new museology also involves the topics related to social and political roles of museums (Mairesse & Desvallées, 2010), broadening accessibility and representation of diverse populations (Stam, 1993), and taking the role in resolving discrimination and inequality within society (Sandell, 2007). There is also a significant shift in

the identity of museum professionals from the “legislators” to “interpreters” and turned more tourist-oriented (Ross, 2004). Museums’ sole function is no longer maintenance of archives, preservation of objects, and display of collections which have always been regarded as their traditional purpose. Instead, the new museology cares for the needs of the communities and is becoming the highest guiding principle for museum practice.

Based on the definitions given above, we can understand the new museology in this way, which is it places the focus on people (visitors and audiences) rather than the material foundation of museums (collections). It provides a new concept of humanism, in which the museum responds to the needs and desires of people. This is a significant shift of museum focus, from collection-centered to visitor-centered. Xinyi Luo (1998, pp.88-103) created a chart to explain the differences between traditional museology and the new framework:

*(This blank was left intentionally)*

	<b>Traditional museology</b>	<b>New museology</b>
<i><b>What is it based on?</b></i>	Collections	People
<i><b>Focus</b></i>	Methods	Purposes
<i><b>Development strategies</b></i>	Academic research; expert-oriented; elitism	Audience demand; expert participation
<i><b>Display method</b></i>	Static; well-classified; focused on the past; the academic atmosphere is strong and seldom allows the audience to participate; it is generally believed that the information is taught; longer exhibition time	Dynamic; focus on the future; adopting technology and engaging the audience as much as possible; exhibits are inspiring; focusing on providing entertainment and leisure; using multi-media to convey the message; emphasis on updating the display approximately every seven years.

### Visitors' interactive experiences

Museums are important public learning institutions, as well as science centers, zoos and historical sites (Packer & Ballantyne, 2002). To better build a public learning environment and improve the practice correspondingly, it is important for scholars to understand visitor experiences in these institutions. The observations made by the Liverpool Museum in England in 1884 on the behavior of the audience is the earliest museum audience study in the literature (Hein, 1998). In 1897, German experimental psychologist G. T. Fechner used question and answer interviews to understand the audience's reaction to the artwork for the first time in a museum (Shi, 2003). In 1916, Benjamin Gilman's exploration of audiences visiting the Boston

Museum of Fine Arts in the United States can be regarded as the earliest museum audience study in the 20th century (Hein, 1998). John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking interviewed more than 2,000 museum visitors in the United States, Britain, India, and other countries to gain insight into the audience's needs, motives, memories and other psychological experiences during their visit to the museum. The term experience has been used frequently in almost all museum experiences involved with the contextual model of learning since *The Museum Experience* (Falk, 1992) was published. According to this model, the audience experience of museums meant interacting with each other in personal, physical and social-cultural contexts (Falk, 1992), resulting in social, environmental and intellectual contacts within the overall the museum experience. Falk and Dierking (2013) indicates that for a considerable proportion of the audience, learning knowledge and being educated are not the best results for them to visit and experience the museum, but a special environment, a fun experience, or a happy time spent with the family. Caulton (1998) demonstrates how to effectively plan and run exhibitions by museums that can enable the audience to achieve through hands-on participation. At present, the research on interactive exhibition of museums are still relatively limited in China, but some scholars have been noticed the visitors' interactive experience in museums.

### **Museum Practice**

The exhibit is made through the public display of the objects to communicate with the visitors (Lv, 1998). The words “exhibit” and “display”, which are often used in museums, are not exactly the same in meaning (Lv, 1998). Simply put, ‘display’ refers to the arrangement of items through design, and ‘exhibit’ refers to display with interpretations (Burcaw, 1997). In other words, the museum's exhibition aims at communicating information, ideas, and emotions related

to humans and their environment through the multimedia approach of communicating with audience (Lv, 1998). The use of label also can affect visitors' experiences, and the acceptance of the texts to diverse audience and fulfilling the educational goals are vital to the educational institutions (Ravelli, 1996). Serrel (1996) illustrates that people don't come to the museum because of the educational information but for their own reasons, so the labels are not necessary to be long. Also, museums need to be more creative in distinguishing the range of the information offering and the visitor makes the choice that will shape their visits (Pekarik, 2004). Although the display mode is usually dominated by visual media, the broad sense should include multiple combinations of olfactory, auditory, tactile, and taste (Verhaar, 1989). Lee and Lee (2017) indicates that the 'interactive exhibition' refers to the exhibition of the main content in a certain space using interactive design, scene, the situational simulation, etc., so the audience can experience, understand and even reflect on the information to be conveyed through the sensory experience. Strictly speaking, it is an interpretive method of museum, which becomes increasingly important (Lee & Lee, 2017). Sundbo and Darmer (2008) point out that the experience the museum created for the visitors should be attractive and entertaining, and only this can enable the audience to immerse themselves in the culture. The concept of the new museum in terms of exhibit design is dedicated to creating a free and comfortable exhibition space, which allow the audience to experience the theme and the connotation of each exhibit through their own hearing, sight, touch and even taste and smell (Yue, 2016).

## CHAPTER 3. CASE STUDY AND ANALYSIS

### Introduction

The case study was conducted in the Hubei Provincial Museum (HBPM) in Wuhan, China. The purpose of this case study is to explore if the HBPM is engaging the new museology into its daily practices, that is, focuses on the interactive visitor experiences. As previously defined, the daily practices include the curator, docents, and the public educator's professional work. Based on this definition, the case study was conducted focusing on three main categories, **exhibit design**, **educational gallery tour**, and the **public program**. The case study includes observations, interviews, a review of the annual reports, and photographs. In each part, the researcher observed different elements in the museum with the specific intention. Interviews with Quanwen Wan, the Deputy Executive Director and Hong Qian, the Director of the Public Program gave me a more in-depth understanding of the professional work behind the exhibits.

HBPM is a state-level non-profit organization constructed in 1953. It is an institution that primarily focuses on cultural relics collection, exhibition, and promotion and also serves an important research center of archaeological exploration, discovery, and relic protection in the province. HBPM is one of the eight key museums sponsored jointly by the national and local governments. There are more than 230,000 collections in HBPM, a number that increases as more and more relics are unearthed. HBPM has 11 permanent exhibits as well as temporary exhibits that are shown in conjunction with different partners. They also have many programs targeting different audiences.

Out of the many permanent exhibits in HBPM, the author chose the “Marquis Yi of Zeng” (MYZ) as the main exhibit as a case to study. MYZ is one of the most popular exhibits in

HBPM, the Marquis Yi of Zeng bells is displayed in this exhibit, and most of the public program is based on this exhibit to achieve the museum's educational goals.

## Case Study

### Exhibit Design

As previously defined, exhibit design includes any infrastructure, collections, labels, and panels in an exhibition area that can help visitors understand the exhibit. Of the elements included in the definition, this research focused on the labels, panels, and the interactive area in the exhibit.

For the study, I interviewed the curator, and observed the exhibit display in the museum gallery. I tried to analyze the exhibit design with the following factors:

1. Evidence of coordinated planning between curator and educator in the exhibition
2. Expression of ideas that present clear and concise information
3. Effective content and visual design of text and auxiliary content (panels and labels)
4. Use of the interactive area

The entrance of the MYZ Hall is a giant title fresco (see figure 1). The background of the mural is the abstraction of a map and the abstraction of a mascot of Zeng, which is an ancient nation in this



Figure 1. The entrance of Marquis Yi of Zeng

region. This fresco creates a sense of mystery and can inspire the visitor's curiosity about the exhibits. This sense of mystery and curiosity builds a good pre-visit experience for the visitor. Wan said that the first impression is very important to the visitors, so the design of the entrance of the exhibition hall initially had been discussed and

revised several times. The design of the entrance is a combination of traditional and modern arts. The use of traditional Chinese characters can make visitors feel as if they are back in Yi's era, which is the pre-Qin dynasty, 2400 years ago. The use of modern focused lighting can make the audience aware of the highlights of the exhibition hall and thus stay curious about the collections and stories.

Each collection piece has its own label written in both Chinese and English (see Figure



Figure 2. *Bronze zun and its matching tray (left) and its label (right)*

2). The label has the name, usage, and a simple explanation of the piece. Wan said: “.... the label is written in a short way, ... and what we do is try to emphasize the most important part of the collection item... the docent and volunteer [the interpreters] can explain the history and the story more in more detail” (my translation). Indeed, in order to reduce the subjective influence and stimulate the visitors’ imagination, the text on the label is usually limited to no more than 150 words. General language ensures that anyone with a basic reading ability can understand the label. Because the collections of the HBPM are mainly from archaeological discoveries, most of the ancient objects have the characters that are rarely used today as names, for example, “𠂔” (pronounce: *wei* in Chinese, which is a kind of axle in ancient China, see Figure 3), “𠂔”





Figure 3. Wei

(pronounce: *you* in Chinese, which is a kind of wine vessel in ancient China, see Figure 4); for those collections, the label would be phoneticized to help visitors pronounce and understand the name.

However, if the same explanation is directly



Figure 4. You

translated into English, there will be difficulties in translating meaning. For instance, in Figure 2, the collection's name is *zun*, which is a Chinese pronunciation that does not translate into English.

For the comparatively outstanding collections, like the *Marquis Yi of Zeng Bell* (see



Figure 5. Marquis Yi of Zeng Bell

Figure 5), there is a panel

explanation of the collection in detail next to the objects (see Figure

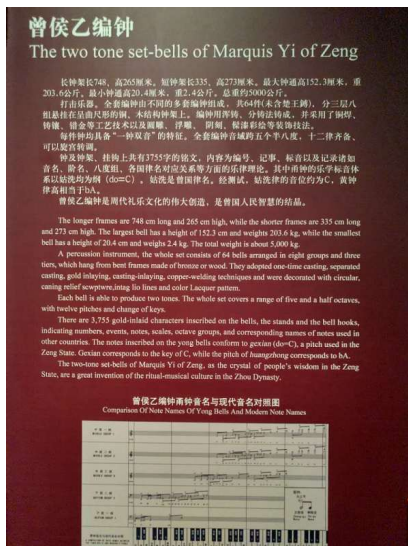


Figure 6. Panel of Marquis Yi of Zeng Bell

6). These panels generally have a detailed explication (including names, uses, important methods of production, important rituals and the like) of the collection. The descriptions on the panels are written by archaeologists and cultural experts using a lot of field terminology. These concise and professional vocabularies ensure the accuracy of the interpretation, but for ordinary audiences, it can increase the difficulty of understanding, even making the labels incapable of being comprehended. If there are too many words on the

panel, it could take five minutes or longer to read at a normal reading speed. Wan said many visitors grow tired of seeing too many words and choose to browse through them.

Another kind of panel also used for the items is graphical representation. The *Bronze jian and fou* (see Figure 7 left) is an ancient Chinese wine and ritual utensil. The

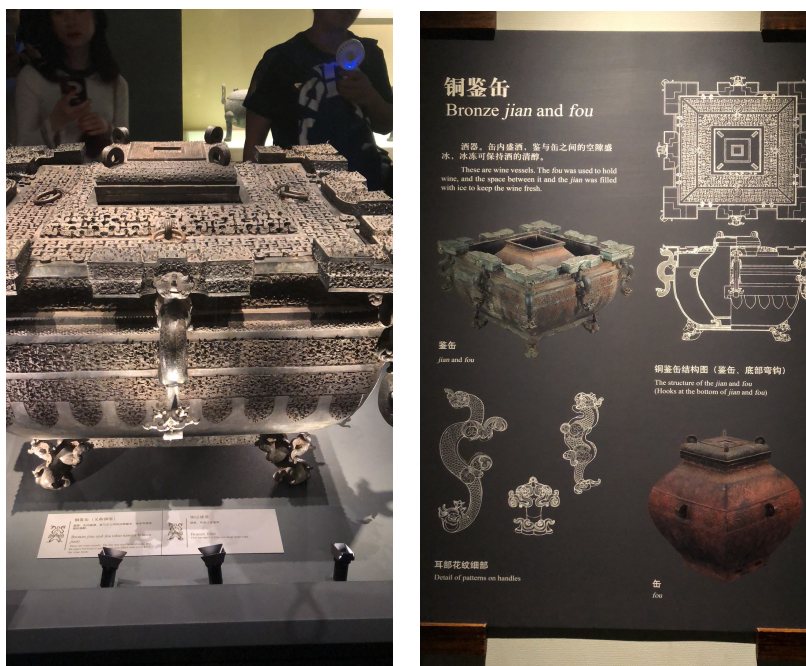


Figure7. *Bronze jian and fou* (left) and its graphical panel (right)

structure of this *Bronze jian and fou* is sophisticated, just as the panel in Figure 7 (right) shows and can be interpreted as “the refrigerator of ancient China”. This kind of panel can better help the visitors understand the collections. A visitor said he did not understand the collection until he saw the graphic panel and understood even better after listening to the docent’s explanation. Another visitor, who spent a lot of time in front of the panel while I conducted my observation, said there was too little explanation on it, and she was still confused after reviewing the panel. I often conversed with the visitors during my time working in the museum as a docent: when I explained to them that the *Bronze jian and fou* was used as a refrigerator in 2400 years ago, they always said that this explanation was easy to understand. Through these observations and conversations, it became apparent that this kind of graphical panel does help the visitor understand the collection, but still needs improvement. It would be helpful if the museum were

to show a picture of modern refrigerator next to the panel helping visitors better understand the object and the wisdom of the ancestor.

What makes a good panel and label? Alice Parman points out in her book, *Exhibit Makeovers: Do-It-Yourself Exhibit Planning*, a good label should be clear and concise, and contain legible information, rather than being illegible or using specialized terminology (Parman, 2017, p 20). These labels could include stories about daily life and about how objects were used and use the kinds of thing a general population could relate to instead of complex jargon.

When I was doing the observation in the museum gallery, I tried to find an interactive area that needed visitors to engage with the exhibit using one of the senses (seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, or smelling). One exhibit uses a touch screen to display information about the *Porcelain*



Figure 8. Touch screen of *Porcelain Vase decorated in blue-and-white with scenes of the four 'cherishes' in panels*

*Vase decorated in blue-and-white with scenes of the four 'cherishes' in panels* (see Figure 8). In the center of the screen is a silhouette of a vase with various touch points in the middle. Visitors can touch any button, and each button corresponds to the playback of different graphics and video, including the history of the collection, background, and production methods.

This is a great example of how to engage the visitors with the exhibit. The visitor must touch specific parts of the screen to read more about different topics or to watch and listen to a video or audio. HBPM recently introduced this touch screen, and the visitors are still at the stage

of exploration. Wan said, "... the museum knows about the importance of the use of new media, but the maintenance and budget are huge challenges for the museum."

In addition to the touch screen, in 2014 HBPM and the Computer Science and Technology Department at Wuhan University jointly developed the "3D Ancient Musical Instrument Playing System (3D MIS)" (see Figure 9). The performance system restores the musical tones and performances of ancient musical instruments through 3D technology. The audience can play these old musical instruments and listen to ancient musical sounds by finger tapping or playing. The visitors can also watch the video through touching specific buttons (see Figure 10).

HBPM preserves and displays many ancient musical instruments from the pre-Qin period. Due to their age, most of the musical instruments cannot be physically played today, and the audience is unfamiliar with them. Such a system can allow viewers to feel the magnificence of rites and music in China and to allow the museum to truly play the role of a non-formal educational institution in society.

Today, visitors are expecting a better museum experience with high technical content and visual effects. Among the various two-dimensional display methods, the combination of images and text is still the main mode of communication between the museum and the visitors. With the help of information technology, huge amounts of information are readily available. This has, to a



Figure 9. Visitor playing an instrument on 3D MIS



Figure 10. Visitor watching video on 3D MIS

certain extent, promoted the transformation of static display panels into interactive multimedia LED screens, which can offer better guidance for visitor engagement with the museum.

For the visitors, a fascinating museum experience is achieved by continuous self-exploration in an interactive environment. A simpler explanation is that the museum creates a special three-dimensional space for conveying a story using exhibit design. If the visitors' museum experience is simply understood as a mere browsing of exhibits, the core meaning, which is to feel, will be lost. The exhibition design is exactly for the purpose of inviting visitors to obtain a subjective and individualized aesthetic response through interaction with the exhibits, while a simple, static, rigid and tedious display and even noisy environment will result in the "browse only" experience for the visitors.

### **Educational Gallery Tour**

HBPM educational programs consist of full-time docents and volunteers, and these two teams jointly provide the educational tours of the history and culture associated the collections. In addition to these two teams, HBPM also has the automatic audio player that can help the visitor understand the exhibit.

In this case study, I analyze the educational gallery tour in two main sections. One of the major parts is the learning styles that are used in the tour. I set out to determine whether the tour is given in a *teaching style* or in an *active learning style*. I analyze this section with the following factors:

1. Acceptance of the information
2. Visitor engagement

Another section is the message delivery method. I approached this part by analyzing the *manual interpretation* and *audio player explanation*. I measured this using the same aspect.



**Learning style.** In 2014, HBPM had over 300 volunteers and nearly 20 full-time docents. Qian said docents and volunteers need to finish a three-month training before starting their work at the museum. During the training, the main courses that are offered by the museum are on local history and culture, etiquette, and educational psychology, etc. Wan pointed out the importance of the educational psychology by saying, "... you must understand the psychology of the audience to know how to provide either better interpretive services or public program for them and how to let them participate in the exhibition .... and this is for both docents and the volunteers ...the time for 'telling their own story' is now gone ... If the museum wants to go further, the demand of the visitor must come the first." (translation conducted by this researcher in 2017)

The visitors are expecting not only a simple explanation of every object but also the more in-depth stories in relation to the culture and history of the collection. In another word, they are expecting a conversation. During the gallery tour, the docent and the volunteer will use a microphone to make sure each visitor can hear her/him (see Figure 11). In this way, the basic foundation for the acceptance of the information is laid.



Figure 11. Docent using a microphone in a gallery tour

During my observation of the tour with a docent and several nonlocal visitors, the docent used mixed methods to convey the information and engage the visitors. When she introduced the theme and background of the exhibit, she used a teaching style to deliver the message by telling important information about the exhibit, for instance, the excavation year, the purpose of the

exhibit, the historical background and so on. In this way, she built a solid foundation for the visitors to put themselves in the corresponding historical timeframe, which is useful for them to understand the in-depth message about culture and history that the exhibit wants to convey.

In addition to using teaching style, the docent used the interactive style as well. The gallery tour is not designed to cover every object in the exhibit hall; thus, the docent interpreted the most important and meaningful item in detail. When the docent was interpreting the significant object, she slowed down and started using a more engaging method to trigger the visitors' interest. She first introduced basic information about the collection and tried to raise the visitors' interest by asking a question in relation to the object. After the question, the docent was not eager to reveal the answer but encouraged the visitors to guess the potential answers, and after a period of time, she gave the group the answer and the detailed explanation.

This is a great example of mixing the teaching style with the learning style in a tour. Wan and Qian indicated that they attach great importance to docents' work because they are the most direct way to communicate the history of the arts, culture and even the museum to the visitors. The mix of the teaching style and learning style encourage an autonomous, spontaneous and active learning museum experience for the visitor, rather than just a passive educational tour. Wan also told me that every year HBPM organizes the docents to learn the interpretive patterns and techniques; for instance, in 2014 HBPM organized a one-week field trip to the National Museum and conducted an assessment at the end of the training.

Use of docents or volunteers as a mode of information dissemination allows the tour guides (the docents/volunteers) to influence how the materials is presented and to insert their own opinion, much like "teaching" in school education. In this process, the audience's autonomy is absent. Visitors cannot tour the exhibits based on their own preferences but must follow the

docent/volunteer, and they easily become a passive visitor because they miss the ability to explore. Docents cannot avoid personal bias; the docent's own interests, expressions, habits, and even emotions will directly affect their communication of the museum's collections. The beginning of a tour is to initially impart an understanding of the collections, while as the interpretation advances in the interaction and conversation should play a role in the guiding visitors.

***Automatic Audio Player.*** In addition to manual interpretation, the automatic audio is another way of receiving the explanation. Visitors can get the automatic audio player at the front desk of the museum and tour the museum halls with it. When encountering the objects with a sign (see figure 12), visitors can place the player close to the sign and the machine will automatically start playing the interpretive recording.

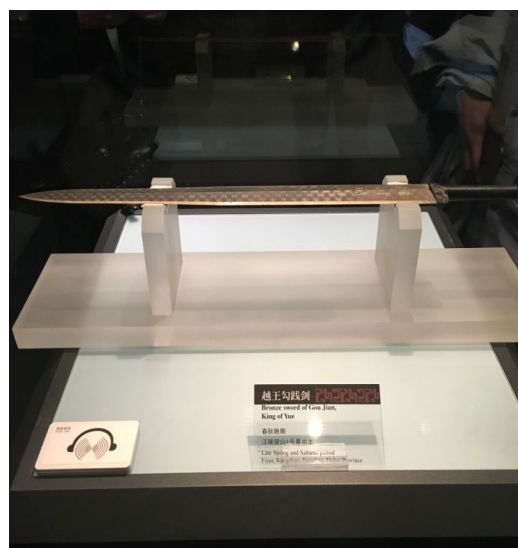


Figure 12. Collection item with the automatic audio sign

There are several advantages of using an audio guide instead of docent. The auto audio player provides a guaranteed standardization of the accurate information and encourages visitors to explore the museum independently. Additionally, the automatic player can be set in multiple languages, which is a huge advantage compared with docents or volunteers; it can offer foreign visitors from various countries the same quality of a collection's interpretation.

In 2014, HBPM conducted a questionnaire survey on the choice of interpretation methods for visitors. The results of the questionnaire analysis showed that more than 42.1% of visitors chose to have a volunteer or docent to offer the gallery tour, while only 2.1% of visitors chose to



follow the automatic audio player (HBPM 2014 annual report). This number shows that visitors have a preference to have a guide helping them understand the exhibits. What causes the preference for human guides?

In order to further understand why the visitor prefers a docent or the volunteer, the researchers conducted further interviews with the visitors who toured the museum with either a docent or a volunteer. The result (HBPM 2014 annual report) showed that visitors tend to choose a docent or a volunteer for the following reasons: 1. Compared to a tour alone, visitors can learn more important cultural and historical information in a short period of time with the help of a docent or volunteer. 2. The interpretive service of the volunteer is free while there is a rental fee for the auto audio player. 3. The visitor prefers to have someone guide them to visit, just like a teacher guides his/her students.

Automatic players have advantages that cannot be achieved by a docent or the volunteer; however, they are unable to provide the interactive experiences that are only achievable with human interpreters.

### **Public Program**

HBPM presents a series of educational programs to the public. Of those many programs, this paper examines two that focus on different audiences. One, the *Li Yue Xue Tang* (LYXT), which means “the rites and music school,” is oriented to the general visitor in the museum. The other, *Let me be your eyes*, is directed toward the visually-impaired. The researcher chose these two since they target different audiences with the same interactive type programs. The study of these two different programs helped the researcher better understand how this type of interpretation presents the new museology.

In the case study, I interviewed the educator and the participants, observed the educational activities, and also reviewed the past event reports. I tried to analyze the public program using four main factors:

1. The implementation of the new media (interactive element)
2. The interaction with visitors (interactive activity)
3. The educational purpose
4. Audience coverage

LYXT is a series of educational activities that aims to promote the concept of social rules for etiquette and harmony, which is a spiritual belief system from ancient China. It has programs to teach the audiences about the ancient musical instrument *Marquis Yi of Zeng bells* in order to learn ancient rituals and music systems and how to combine them with the etiquette norms of modern society.

Each program has a specific theme that is either culturally or historically relevant. The educator uses audio, video, PowerPoint (PPT), role-playing, participation, and touch to conduct the activities. In general, the first stage of the program is the educator conducting a lecture on the theme through PowerPoint (see Figure 13). Although new media such as video, audio, PowerPoint are used, this stage is a



Figure 13. An educator is giving a lecture with PowerPoint



Figure 14. Visitors interact with collections

lecture-led process. The educator is mainly a knowledge exporter, and the audience is “passive” in receiving information. In the next stage, the audience can feel the texture of the collections (duplicates) by touching or tapping them to better understand the lives of people in ancient times (see Figure 14). In this stage, visitors can interact with the collection, history, and the meaning behind the exhibit.

Role-playing and participation are also used in the public program (see Figure 15 left).

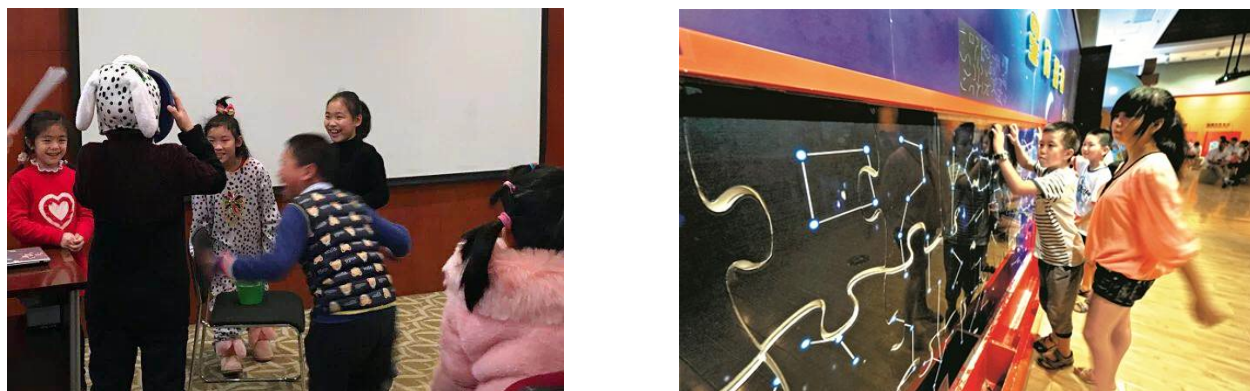


Figure 15. Role-playing (left), and children is playing in the children's experience area (right)

HBPM has a 300-square-meter children's experience area (see Figure 15 right). Through video, simulations of an archeological site, and simple games, children can learn about the excavation process and further develop their interest in archeological discovery. One of the parents, who was waiting outside the children's area, said: “the most exciting thing for my son is the role-playing game, and I would like to bring him to the museum every week if it has this kind of event.”

Qian said that currently the "Rite Music School" has developed a classification program that includes kindergartens, elementary schools, junior high schools, high schools, colleges, schools for the blind, and adults, and fully meets the needs of social education. In order to meet the needs of special groups of society for museum culture, "Rituals and Schools" also care about

the left-behind children, children of migrant workers, blind people, welfare institutions and other vulnerable groups and institutions.

*Let me be your eyes* is a sub-program of LYXT that focuses on the visually-impaired visitors. Instead of utilizing PowerPoint, video and other kind of media that people need to watch, the educator slightly modifies the method that is used for the general visitors by using voice and audio to deliver the interpretive message and to allocate more time on the interactive action. All visitors can touch, tap, hold, and use the collection duplicates to feel the physical substance of the subject and, thus, have a totally different experience than one that involves just listening (see Figure 16). Qian said one of the blind male participants asked her to hold the program regularly because he thought this experience had changed his impression of the museum to be much more memorable. Qian said that visitors rarely go to the museum because most of the museum is not “friendly” to the people with disabilities, and that is a huge barrier that prevents people with disabilities from going to the museum.



Figure 16. Visitor touches the collection duplicate



Figure 17. Bell performance

HBPM also uses historical recurrence to engage the visitors. In the Bell Performance Hall, there is a complete set of duplicated ancient musical instruments, and a 30-minute bell performance is performed by the Chime Bell Orchestra twice a day. Actors are in period dress

(see Figure 17), and they simulate the royal feast scene, building a positive bond between visitors and history.

There are many ways for visitors to participate in the exhibition, to touch, feel and integrate into the theme of the exhibit, which can be summarized as the transfer of meaning outside the exhibit showcase. Apart from high-cost technologies used in some museums, the traditional performances, the reproduction of historical scenes, and the craft activities can also be part of the visitors' engagement with the museum's material. Through the LYXT series programs, visitors can meet the "ancient" people, touch the ancient objects, hear the music, watch a cultural performance, all of which tells the story of the exhibits, and better engage them into the museums.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All the photographs in this chapter were taken by the author during work at the HBPM from 2012.9 - 2015. 3

## CHAPTER 4. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter includes the conclusion about whether HBPM incorporates the new museology in their professional practice and provides recommendations of how HBPM can better integrate the new museology and engage visitors and thus create an interactive and participatory museum. The recommendations are not limited to HBPM but are also made to the majority of the museums in China that would be interested in becoming more interactive and participatory. The recommendations are separated into three parts based on the findings of the case study: *exhibit design*, *educational gallery tour*, and *public program*. These recommendations are made as a result of the author's research and working experiences in both China and the United States, but the museum professionals must make the decisions depending on the differing cultural and individual needs of the museum and its visitors.

### Recommendations

#### Exhibit Design

Due to the fact that HBPM is a museum that primarily maintains items from archaeological excavations, the objects date from thousands of years ago; as a result, they are temporally removed from modern day visitor's experiences. For HBPM and similar Chinese museums, comparing ancient items with modern objects is a good practice to help visitors better understand their cultural significance and history. For instance, when interpreting the Bronze Jian and fou, a panel with a picture of a modern refrigerator can help the visitor better understand the function of the object.

The implementation of an interactive area in the exhibit hall is also a useful way to create a participatory museum. In the case study of HBPM, the interactive element is limited, as well as

the new media. For the museums that have limited government funding, they can build the simple, inexpensive modes for visitor interaction. For example, the Museum of Natural and Cultural History in Eugene, Oregon, U.S., has a section that mimics the fossil laboratory where visitors can gain knowledge about fossil using role-playing. The interactive area is not limited to high-tech appliances but can include any creative element that can raise the visitors' level of engagement in the exhibit. However, due to the heavy visitor load in certain Chinese museums, I recommend creating a separate space for the visitor to experience the interaction rather than using the exhibit hall. In this way, there can be a maximum protection of some valuable and fragile collection items.

### **Educational Gallery Tour**

In most western museums, there is rarely a full-time docent, and the educational gallery tour is taken by the volunteers in some specific time period. Due to the large amount of cultural history that needs to be given to visitors, the presence of the full-time docent is necessary. I would recommend the docent ask more open-ending questions to encourage the visitors to stay engaged during the tour, rather than merely being passive recipients of information.

The use of the auto audio player is great for the foreign visitors, who cannot use the docent or the volunteers for the museum tour. In addition, the interpretation of the automatic player can be more engaging as well. Instead of simply explaining the objects, the player can use a more interactive recording. For instance, the recording can more questions and leave time for visitors to think and reflect, creating a great museum experience.

### **Public Program**

The public programs of HBPM have been widely accepted by the visitors and have

achieved relative success. However, the visitor coverage is relatively small. Because there is no fixed platform to post public program information, visitors cannot be informed of programs in advance; thus, the programs are likely to be filled with participants who have randomly chosen to participate, and some other outreach programs target specific communities, like the blind. My suggestion is to organize the social media platform to publish the program information on a regular basis, so the public program can serve a large part of the general public. Other Chinese museums can also take advantage of social media and flexibly use a user database to promote their public programs and expand the accessibility to most of the general public.

The mode of delivering the public program in HBPM is a good combination of a teaching and learning style. I recommend the program use more open-ended activities, allowing visitors to learn and ask questions. The museum can then choose the appropriate educational services for each visitor based on their needs. This balance of modes can be difficult to achieve, but with the collective effort of different departments in the museum, it can be implemented. Once it becomes a reality, HBPM will become known as a participatory museum.

## **Conclusion**

The research answered the original research question and sub-questions listed in the first chapter in this paper. Through literature review, case study, observation, and interviews, it is fair to say that HBPM is engaging the concept of the new museology and is in transition to becoming a participatory museum.

As clarified in the first chapter, the new museology refers to a significant shift in the function of the museum from a collection-oriented museum to a visitor-oriented museum. The manifestations of a collection-oriented museum are the prioritizing of the functions of research,



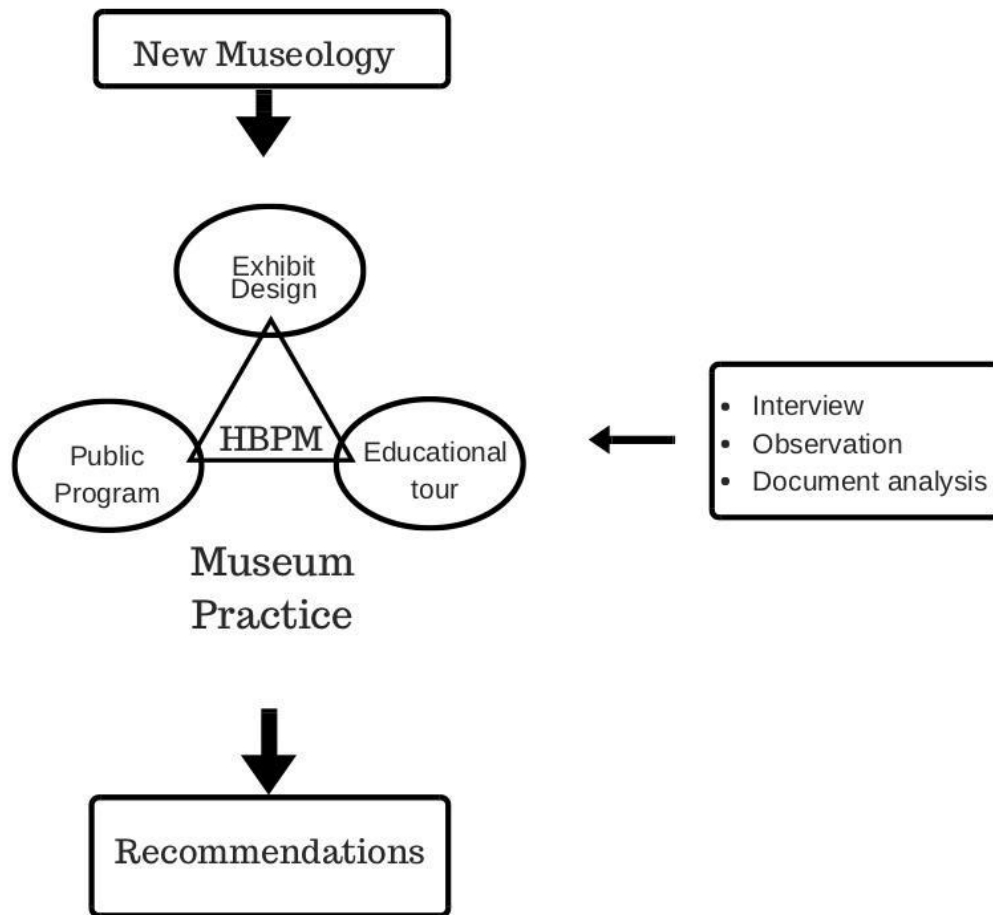
preservation, and collections. On the other hand, the museum that incorporates the concepts of the new museology emphasizes the visitor experience, engagement, and interaction in the museum visit.

In HBPM, the exhibition design is still based on static display, and the exhibition mode is still a combination of traditional showcase and text. There is still much room for improvement in the museum's exhibitions, making static exhibitions more dynamic and attractive. The educational gallery tour and public program are prioritizing visitors, which is a sign of being a visitor-center museum.

In the new museology, the number of collections is no longer a significant priority for a museum. The rational use of collection items, extensive cooperation with partners, and promotion of audience participation in learning have become the core elements of enhancing museum competitiveness. The function of the museum has transformed from being traditional cultural relics storage site to a cultural relics exhibition site and then to an organization that has the power to influence the community. Without the participant and interaction of the visitors, the spacious space, valuable collection items, and excellent exhibitions cannot be accountable as the functional role of a museum, and thus cannot offer a positive museum experience to the visitors. For museums that have financial appropriations, free admission and hosting fancy exhibitions are not the sole purpose of existence. It is equally important to have an active dialogue with potential and existing visitors and to provide opportunities for the visitors to participate and engage with the museum.

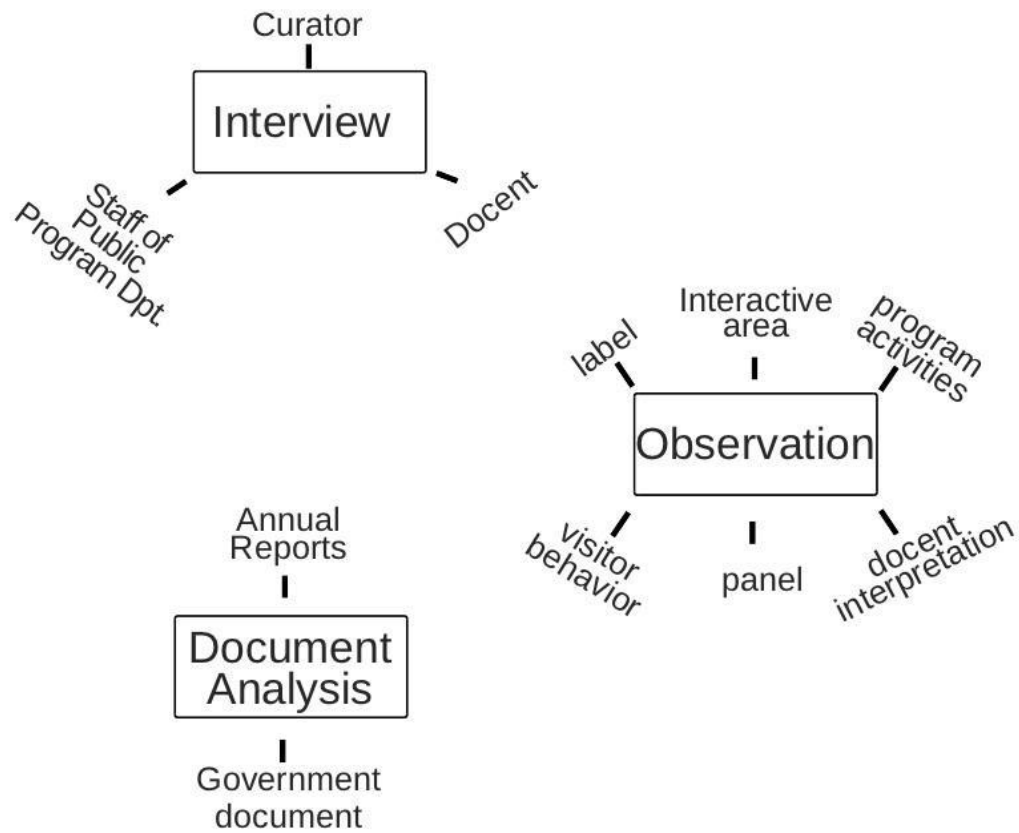
## Appendix A

### *Conceptual framework schematic*



## Appendix B

### *Data collection schematic*



## **Appendix C**

### *Detailed research timeline*

November 2017, submit IRB application

December 2017, data collection in Hubei Provincial Museum in China

January 2018, data collection in the Museum of Natural and Cultural History in the US

February – March 2018, data organization and analysis

March – May 2018, full paper writing

**Appendix D***Interviews for the Executive Deputy Director in Hubei Provincial Museum**Case Study:**Key Descriptor:**Date:**Interview Location:**Interviewee Details:**Consent:*    ☐ Oral    ☐ Written (form)    ☐ Audio Recording☐ OK to Quote*Notes on Interview Context:**Key Points:**CODING**INFORMATION**NOTES*

|

|

*Semi-Structured Interview Questions:*

1. Do you know the general concept of the new museology? How do you think about it?
2. In which ways do you think Hubei Provincial Museum is consistent with the new museology?
3. Are you familiar with the “*Museum Regulation*” enacted in 2015? In which ways do you think Hubei Provincial Museum in compliance with the regulations?
4. Do you think that the museums in China are engaging the new shift in taking visitors as a center?
5. Do you think there are any deficiencies or need to improve in the practice of museums in China?

## Appendix E

### *Data Collection Sheet for Observation*

*Case Study:*

*Data ID:*

*Key Descriptor:*

Date:

*Activity Location:*

*Activity:* \_\_\_\_\_ visitor behavior \_\_\_\_\_ docent tour

\_\_\_\_ Participant in program

*Details:*

## CODING

## OBSERVATION

## NOTES

## Appendix F

### *Data Collection Sheet for Document Analysis*

*Case Study:*

*Key Descriptor:*

*Date:*

*Document Location:*

*Document Type :* \_\_\_\_ Annually reports, \_\_Article, \_\_\_\_Book etc.

\_\_\_\_ Website, \_\_Government document,

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

*Reference Citation:*

*CODING*

*INFORMATION*

*NOTES*



## Appendix G

Recruitment email to participants:

Dear (participant):

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *The New Museology in Museum Practice in China*, conducted by Sisi Lu from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this study is to explore and how the museum practices in China reflect or not reflect the new museology.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your leadership position and/or involvement with the practical work in the Hubei Provincial Museum. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to participate in an in-person interview, lasting approximately one hour, in December of 2017. If you wish, interview questions will be provided beforehand for your consideration. Interviews will take place at Hubei Provincial Museum, or at a more conveniently located site. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will use an audio recorder for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or email.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [slu@uoregon.edu](mailto:slu@uoregon.edu), or Dr. Patricia Lambert at [pdewey@uoregon.edu](mailto:pdewey@uoregon.edu).

Thank you in advance for your interest and consideration. I will follow up with you soon by email to answer any questions you might have and to hopefully schedule a time to meet for an interview.

Sincerely,

Sisi Lu

## Appendix H

### *Consent forms*

Research Protocol Number: 11212017.031

#### **The New Museology in Museum Practice in China**

Sisi Lu, Principal Investigator

Arts and Administration Program

School of Planning, Public Policy and Management

University of Oregon

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *The New Museology in Museum Practice in China*, conducted by Sisi Lu from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this study is to better understand how "new museology" is affecting the museum practices in China.

The literature indicates that there is a trend of from being a collection-centered to a visitor-centered museum, which seems affect both the western museum and the museum in China. This study intends to understand how this trend is changing the museum practice in the Hubei Provincial Museum through interviews, observations, survey, and document analysis.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your leadership position with Hubei Provincial Museum and your experiences with and expertise pertinent to cultural development in Wuhan. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to participate in an in-person interview, lasting approximately one hour, in winter or spring 2018. In addition to

taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will use an audio recorder for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or email.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will be carefully and securely maintained. All research records will be stored on a password-protected computer, and hard copies of documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Audio recordings will be immediately uploaded to password-protected storage and erased from the audio device. Research records will be retained through completion of this research project for validation purposes and shortly past publication of the master's research project; research records will be destroyed one year after completion of the study. Only the principal investigator and the faculty research adviser will have access to these records.

There are minimal risks (loss of privacy and/or breach of confidentiality) associated with participating in this study. To maintain the credibility of the research, I intend to identify participants and use quotes from participants in the final publication. Your consent to participate in this interview, as indicated below, demonstrates your willingness to have your name used in any resulting documents and publications and to relinquish confidentiality. You will have the opportunity, if you wish, to review and quotes and paraphrasing of your statements prior to publication. It may be advisable to obtain permission to participate in this interview to avoid potential social or economic risks related to speaking as a representative of your institution. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

I anticipate that the results of this research project will be of value to the museum industry as a whole, especially in the Hubei Provincial. However, I cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [slu@uoregon.edu](mailto:slu@uoregon.edu), or Dr. Patricia Lambert at [pdewey@uoregon.edu](mailto:pdewey@uoregon.edu). Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office for Research Compliance Services, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, (541) 346-2510.

Please read and initial the following statements to indicate your consent. Because interviewees differ in their wishes for information to be collected during the interview and in reviewing the information before publication, please specify your understandings and preferences in the list below:

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that I will be identified as a participant in this research project.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to the use of note taking during my interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to the use of audio recording during my interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to the potential use of quotations from the interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to the use of information I provide regarding the organization with which I am associated.

\_\_\_\_\_ I wish to have the opportunity to review and possibly revise my comments and the information that

I provide prior to these data appearing in the final version of any publications that may result from this study. I understand that the principal investigator will send me by email a copy of all of the quotes and paraphrases that are directly attributable to me, and that I will have the opportunity to approve and/or revise these statements by a clearly defined deadline.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. You have been given a copy of this letter to keep.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your interest and participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Sisi Lu

[slu@uoregon.edu](mailto:slu@uoregon.edu)

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